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SUBJECT: GOP TO SEEK QUICK TPA RATIFICATION IN JULY

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¶1. (SBU) First Vice President/Foreign Minister Samuel Lewis Navarro told Ambassador on June 26 that the GOP will seek quick action by Panama's National Assembly to ratify the U.S.-Panama Trade Promotion Agreement (TPA). As the Assembly normally goes into recess after June 30, he said President Martin Torrijos will convene the Assembly for an extraordinary session in July. Following the June 28 TPA signing in Washington, the GOP plans to submit the TPA to the Assembly on Monday, July 2. Lewis expects the Assembly to debate and ratify the pact by mid-July. He appeared unconcerned that there would have been very little time for Panamanians to digest recent changes to the TPA text on labor, environment, IPR, and other issues. (The Trade Ministry had posted the original Spanish draft text on its website last January.)

¶2. (SBU) Lewis understood that the U.S. Congress would not likely consider the Panama TPA before its August recess, given the International Trade Commission's expected September completion of its report on the deal's impact. He further understood the USG's desire to get ratification of all pending FTAs. He said that nobody other than Colombian President Uribe was more anxious than President Torrijos to see the U.S. Congress ratify the U.S.-Colombia FTA, given that the Colombian and Panamanian deals appear lashed together in Washington. However, Lewis reiterated the GOP's concern that the Panama deal not be "held hostage" should Congressional resistance to the Colombia FTA ultimately prove insurmountable.

¶3. (SBU) Comment: The GOP clearly hopes the Assembly's quick TPA ratification would signal Panama's strong support for free trade and help boost support in Washington for prompt U.S. ratification. Lewis's confidence is bolstered by the fact that Torrijos' PRD party controls the unicameral National Assembly and by the support the TPA enjoys among opposition figures. The GOP nonetheless also hopes to avoid a protracted debate that could erode the support (about 62%) of Panamanians for the TPA. End comment.

